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Sharp. Sermon preached at the funeral
of William Eustis. 1825

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April 4, 1917

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SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF HIS

EXCELLENCY WILLIAM EUSTIS, ESQ.

LATE GOVERNOR OF

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS,

IN PRESENCE OF

The Constituted Authorities

OF THE STATE,

FEBRUARY 11, 1825.

BY DANIEL SHARP,

Chaplain of the Senate.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE LEGISLATURE.

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1825.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Feb. 14, 1825.

THE REV. DANIEL SHARP, CHAPLAIN OF THE SENATE.

SIR,—The undersigned, a Committee of both branches of the Legislature, in conformity to their order, present their thanks for the Sermon delivered by you, in presence of the constituted authorities of the State, at the funeral of his late Excellency, WILLIAM EUSTIS, Governor and Commander in Chief of this Commonwealth, and request a copy thereof for the press.

J. RICHARDSON,
JOHN MASON,
CHARLES TRAIN,
HENRY THACHER,
GYRUS MERRICK, } Committee.

SERMON.

PSALM.....XC. 12.—*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

WE are assembled, Fellow Citizens, on an occasion of peculiar and solemn interest. The death of an individual, even in the most obscure walks of society, is to his limited circle of friends an affecting occurrence. And although it cannot be expected that such a case should excite any general notice, yet, when the chief magistrate of a community, who has devoted a long life to the service of his country, is removed by death, the public feel that they have sustained a loss. It is due both to the living and the dead that there should be a public expression of the sympathy which prevails, and of the gratitude which is cherished at the remembrance of patriotic deeds. The living need all the incitement that may be derived from a contemplation of the efforts and sacrifices

which have been made by eminent men; and although the dead cannot be profited by human praise, yet their useful actions ought not to be forgotten.

Influenced by these views, the honorable Executive and the Legislature of the State, as the authorized organs of the public sentiment and feeling, have directed that all suitable honors be paid to the remains of the late venerable Governor of this Commonwealth. By the same direction we are now convened in this house of worship, to implore the blessing of the Almighty, and to make some improvement of this afflictive Providence.

While it is proper that we manifest unfeigned respect for the memory of the distinguished individual who has deceased; and while we give evidence that we are not insensible to the benefits he has conferred, both on the State and on the Nation, we should also be concerned, that this visitation should not pass away, without administering to us some salutary instruction, and leaving some deep and permanent impressions favorable to a life of piety and virtue. It will be my purpose to contribute to this desirable object by offering a few remarks on the importance of

forming a just estimate of the duration of our earthly existence.

There is no future event more certain than the dissolution of the body. In our serious moments we all acknowledge that Death is an enemy from whom we cannot disengage ourselves, and against whom we cannot contend with any hope of success. We can neither bribe him by our wealth, nor can we occupy a station so honorable and elevated, that he will not dare to approach us. "Pale death strikes with equal foot the cottages of the poor and the palaces of princes." We have no strength to resist his power; and no armour which is proof against his arrows, when he marks us as his victims. We are sensible that there is no discharge in this war. Death is a mysterious and awful modification of our existence to which we must submit, whether prepared for it or not.

But notwithstanding we assent to these solemn truths, they leave a very faint impression on our minds, and their practical effect upon us is small, when compared with what might be expected. It is acknowledged that our bodies must return to the earth, and yet how many are as intently occupied concerning them, as if they were to remain

here forever. It is acknowledged that our souls are in every respect superior to our bodies, and yet, alas ! how many act, as though they did not believe in the doctrine of immortality, or the necessity of being made "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Is it asked, why is our conduct so much at variance with the admission of the fact, that we must soon die ? The answer must be, we have not an habitual conviction of this fact on our minds. The love of life is a principle deeply seated in the breast of man, we are therefore induced to put from us the thoughts of death. Surrounded by the things which are seen and temporal, we forget the things which are unseen and eternal. The duties which necessarily occupy our attention ; the cares which distract our thoughts ; and the objects which claim and divide our affections, without the utmost vigilance on our part, will secularize our minds, limit our field of vision, and shut out eternity from our view. We must ascribe to causes like these the inconsistency which is so frequently observable between our conduct and the better dictates of our understandings. Now to neutralize as much as possible the tendency of these things, we should pray with the Psalm-

ist in our text ; “ So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” And we should often and seriously consider our latter end, and the measure of our days, what it is ; that we may know how frail we are.

1. Such a course of pious meditation will give us a just view of the value of our time.

Perhaps there is nothing of which we hear more universal complaint than of the shortness of time. And yet, short as it is, there is nothing which to many is so great a burden. At each stage of their existence they would willingly blot out a portion of their days. The youth would be glad to pass at once to a state of manhood ; and the man in business would willingly pass over the intervening distance, if he might retire from the active concerns of life to scenes of ease and affluence. Were it not impossible to resist the evidence which so frequently forces itself upon us, we could not conceive of the various expedients to which men resort with the hope of annihilating time. When religion is disregarded, and there is no desire to improve the faculties of the mind ; when there is no just view of the duties which are incumbent upon us in social life, and the passions are predominant, solitude becomes irksome, and any thing like

rational employment is a task ; hence the golden moments of life are trifled away, in vain amusements or forbidden pleasures.

Would you apply your hearts unto wisdom ! Would you form a just estimate of the value of time ! address yourselves diligently, and studiously to the arithmetic of human life. Add up the number of your days, and you will be compelled to acknowledge, that they are few and evil ; that your years pass away like a tale that is told ; and that should the days of your years be three score years and ten, yet they will soon be but as yesterday when it is passed, and as a watch in the night. Go to the habitation of one who is just closing his mortal career, and you will there learn, when the last sands of life are running out, when the vital stream has receded to its lowest ebb, and eternity is near, that every moment is more precious than rubies. How important then that we should be parsimonious of our time. We should work while the day lasts, for the night cometh in which no man can work. While there is so much for each of us to do, in contending with the evil propensities of our natures, in attaining higher degrees of intellectual and moral excellence, in performing the private or public duties of our station, and in

promoting works of piety and mercy, we ought never to imagine that we may waste our time. The wisest of men says to each of us; "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest."

2d. A just computation of the number of our days will lead us to form more correct ideas of the nature of earthly good.

If we would arrive at rational conclusions concerning the real value of objects, we must consider, not only their capacity to impart to us present enjoyment, but the extent and duration of that capacity. When the Psalmist on one occasion lost sight of this principle he became extremely perplexed. He saw some around him who were in worldly prosperity; they were increasing in riches; their eyes stood out with fatness; they had more than heart could wish; and when he contrasted their situation with the chastening that he endured all the day long, he repined at the dispensations of providence. But when he went into the sanctuary and understood their end, and was persuaded, that all their pomp and riches would pass away like a dream of the night, his perplexities were remov-

ed, and he exclaimed with pious joy; "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

Were we sure that the houses which we rear and beautify, and the lands which we purchase would be ours for ever, then there might be very powerful reasons urged, why we should employ all our thoughts, and give all our affections, and exhaust all our ehergies on these objects. And if asked why so intent on our houses and lands, we might reply, we are purchasing an estate for eternity, we are building a habitation in which we are to dwell for ever. The word Eternity would stamp an infinite value on these objects, and would give them an importance which nothing merely temporal can possess. But how stands the case? The places which now know us, will soon know us no more for ever. In a very short period our habitations will become the habitations of mourning. The last struggle of dissolving nature will subside, and the funeral car will stand before our doors, to receive our lifeless frames and convey them to the tomb.

If then we look forward to the end of our mortal course, we shall not fail to be convinced, that

it is unwise to give our undivided attention to objects which are all to perish with the using, or from which we must inevitably be taken away. As temporal blessings, which are wisely adapted to our condition, while we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth, they are not to be disregarded; but it is a truth which can not be too deeply impressed on our minds, that soon, the honors we are now so anxious to attain will be of no more value to us than a breath of air; the riches we are now labouring to acquire will be transferred to others; and of all our possessions we shall need nothing, except a shroud, a coffin, and a grave to hide our remains from human view. Such being the evanescent nature of all earthly good, we need not be surprised, that while the apostle Paul thought it proper to give directions concerning one of the most interesting connexions of life, he should have added the following important caution: "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep as though they wept not; and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they possessed not; and they that use this world as not abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away."

Nor will a consideration of the mortality of man have a less happy effect in teaching us the transitory nature of human greatness. When we forget the solemn truth, that our life is but a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away, we are in great danger of being captivated by the splendour of wealth, and of feeling too intense an anxiety to obtain distinction among men. Every moment is employed, and every faculty is exerted for the acquisition of riches or honors; and if these are not obtained we are dissatisfied with our condition, and murmur at the wise allotments of Providence. And it will be well, if others, who have gained these objects, are not viewed by us with a spirit of envy.

There is nothing indeed, in a rational impression, that our days on earth are as a shadow, that should take away a laudable desire for honorable and useful distinction, especially, if it may give us a more favorable opportunity of exerting ourselves for the good of our fellow men. But I am now speaking of an anxiety to be distinguished not as means to attain a valuable end, but merely for the gratification of the pride and vanity of the human heart. And surely, a persuasion that our Creator "will bring us to death and to the house appoint-

ed for all living," cannot fail to diminish our anxiety for an object which is so fleeting and unsubstantial. We must be satisfied that man, at his best estate, is vanity, and that whatever career of glory he may run, he must finish his course in the grave. Whatever station we may occupy, or whatever honors may be conferred upon us by others, the period must come when the places which now know us shall know us no more for ever. Why then, in pursuit of mere worldly honors, should we disquiet ourselves in vain? Why should we cling to objects as solid good, which in a few more days, will in our estimation "be lighter than nothing and vanity?"

Why all this toil for triumphs of an hour?
 Why grasp at air, for what is earth beside?
 What, tho' we wade in wealth, or soar in fame,
 Earth's highest station ends in "Here he lies;"
 And dust to dust concludes her noblest song.

3d. A just view of the number of our days will make us feel the importance of being prepared for death.

"So teach us," says the Psalmist, "to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." And we are informed, by an inspired writer, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning

of wisdom, a good understanding have all they that keep his commandments." Now as we must soon die, and our condition after death will be affected by the character we possess here, it will be perceived, that it is our highest wisdom to be prepared for a future world. It is true, indeed, religion is not to be viewed as some mysterious operation, intended exclusively to fit us for heaven; it is on the contrary to be viewed in relation to our whole existence. It is a peculiar excellence of Christianity that the influence which it exerts over us in making us meet for the world to come, does at the same time make us virtuous members of the world that now is. It teaches us "that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world, and that whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, we should think on these things."

But as there is another and an eternal state upon which we are assured, that we must soon enter, it supplies us with an additional and most weighty reason why we should apply our hearts unto wis-

dom. Perhaps there is not an individual here, who does not admit the importance of religion; and who has not determined, at some future time, to commence the pursuit of it in earnest. When you have accomplished some objects, which in your estimation, at least, are interesting and important, then you propose to become religious. But let me ask, do you know that you shall live to accomplish your purposes? Have you made an agreement with death, or a league with the grave? Your life is suspended by a thread; and while you are pursuing your plans, the thread may be broken, and thus the hand of death may frustrate all your designs. The very possibility that this may be the case, should induce you to "seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near." Instead of its being your chief aim to seek this world first, let the consideration that your days are as a hand-breadth, cause you solemnly to regard the exhortation of the Saviour; "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness: and all these things shall be added unto you." Indeed, a conviction of our frailty, will of itself, be of no particular advantage, unless, by producing a wise forethought, it leads us to prepare, by a life of faith, piety, and virtue on earth, for the eternal happiness of heaven.

Having offered a few remarks, which the mournful dispensation that has brought us together has suggested, it will probably be expected that I shall at least sketch a faint outline of the history and character of our late lamented chief magistrate.

It is to me a source of extreme regret, that I have not been able to obtain a knowledge of such eventful incidents in his life, as no doubt must have occurred to him during a period of seventy years, and which might peculiarly serve to develop the principles and feelings by which his conduct was governed. Neither have I had the advantages arising from personal acquaintance, to enable me to place those traits of character in their best light, which so endeared him to those who were honored with his friendship. Having offered this apology, I trust the candor of my audience will make all due allowance for the imperfect account I shall give of the public life of the deceased.

His late Excellency William Eustis was born at Cambridge, in the month of June, 1752. The residence of his parents was in Boston, but some particular circumstances transpired about that time, which induced them to make a temporary removal. Soon after the birth of their son, how-

ever, they returned to this town, where the deceased received the rudiments of his education. Having been prepared at the public Latin school, he entered the university at Cambridge, and was graduated in 1772. His talents and learning were respectable, and he left college with credit to himself, and pleasure to his friends.

Having made choice of the medical profession, he was so fortunate as to commence his studies with that eminent physician, and ever memorable patriot, Doctor Joseph Warren, who, a short time before his lamented but glorious death, had been appointed a Major General in the army of the revolution. Doctor Eustis, being a young man of ardent feelings, and decidedly in favor of the Independence and liberties of his country, and having studied medicine about three years, with the advice and consent of General Warren, offered his services as a surgeon to the army. On the 19th of April, 1775, he left this town for Cambridge, and with several other young physicians, without a regular commission, voluntarily attended the provincial hospital at that place. He was actively engaged in his professional duties at the battle of Bunker Hill, where Warren, his friend and instructor, fell in the cause of freedom.

In 1776, he was appointed Hospital Surgeon, and was stationed at the hospital at West Point. From this time he continued in the responsible office of a senior surgeon, to the close of the Revolution. In discharging the duties of his station, his promptitude and skill, and his humane and kind attention to his patients were such, as not only endeared him to officers of distinguished rank, but also to private soldiers.

Having witnessed the return of peace, and with it, the only thing which could have made peace desirable, the acknowledgement of our Independence by the mother country, Doctor Eustis took up his abode in this town, and established himself in the duties of his profession.

It could hardly be expected, that a person who had taken such a deep interest in the affairs of his country, and had spent so many years in the army, should be a silent spectator of political events. Hence the deceased took an active and decided part on almost every public subject, whether it related to the government of the town, the affairs of his native State, or the condition of the nation. Nor were his fellow-citizens insensible to his political worth. He was repeatedly elected by

them a member of the House of Representatives. While in the Legislature he acquired a high degree of celebrity as a public speaker. His action was graceful, and he expressed himself in such soft and persuasive tones of eloquence, as to delight all who heard him. Possessing these advantages, it may easily be conceived, that he exerted a powerful influence in all the measures of the State. Having, for several years, taken an active part in the debates and deliberations of the House, during the administration of his Excellency Governor Sullivan, he was two years a member of the Executive Council.

He was frequently elected a member to Congress, and in 1809, such was the opinion of the Executive of the nation of his talents and patriotism, that he was appointed to the distinguished office of Secretary of War. Having remained in that elevated station several years, at the restoration of the House of Orange, he was appointed Public Minister to the Netherlands. On his return, he was again repeatedly sent to Congress from Norfolk District; and on the resignation of the chair of State by another venerated and beloved patriot and soldier of the revolution, he was elected Chief Magistrate of this Commonwealth.

All are united in bearing respectful testimony that his late Excellency was, during a long life, devoted to the welfare of his country ; and, that during the term in which he held the highly responsible office of Governor of this State, it was his ambition to promote its various interests to the utmost of his power.

Those who have known him best, dwell now with pleasing, but melancholy remembrance, on his frank and amiable deportment, his decision of character, and his unbending attachment to the civil and political institutions of his country.

But, whatever services we may render mankind, however honorable a place we may fill, by the preferment of a free and enlightened community, and however long we may be continued on earth, it is the decree of Heaven, "that there is no man who liveth that shall not see death." The address is made to low and high, rich and poor, together : "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." "I have said ye are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High ; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."

Could honorable station, or sincere friendship, or gratitude for long and past services, have secur-

ed to us a little longer the life of our venerated Chief Magistrate, we should not now have been assembled in this house of mourning. But such has been the will of God, and it becomes us to bow with profound submission.

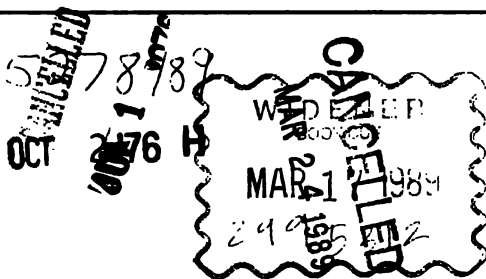
There is something in this event peculiarly affecting to us as citizens of the United States. Another patriot of the revolution is gone. One who saw the commencement of the struggle for independence, whose heart beat high for the freedom of his country, who lived to see its institutions settled on a firm, and we trust, an immovable basis, and to behold and rejoice in the bright morning of its prosperity, is now taken from us. It is a consideration peculiarly humiliating to the pride of man, that of the eminent statesmen and heroes of that period, there are only a few left to tell us with their own lips, what great things God hath done for us in the days that are past. To the few who do survive, we would ever pay the homage of our filial reverence and gratitude.

The short sketch which I have given, will, I trust, impart this instructive lesson, that whatever may be our situation in life, whether private or public, we should honorably and firmly discharge our duty. Had the patriots of our revo-

lution failed in their heroic attempt, they knew, that if death were not the consequence, they would inevitably be covered with obloquy and scorn. But they knew, that the cause in which they had embarked was just, and, therefore, relying on the protection and blessing of Providence, they went forward. Success attended their noble but hazardous enterprise, and their posterity remember them with gratitude. This feeling, so honorable to the character of man, was manifested towards our late Governor, while living, and it has incited the community this day, to pay their last sad tribute of respect at his death.

May we be anxious in our day, and in our respective spheres of action, faithfully to serve our generation; then, when we are gathered to our fathers, the recollection of our names will be precious. Should we be so happy as to render important services to the State, our memory will be associated with those worthies, who laid the foundation of our national greatness, who labored for our independence, and who added new lustre to their former deeds, by establishing a system of government, on the novel, but self-evident principle, that all men are born Free and Equal, and thus, future generations will number us among the benefactors of mankind.

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